

GENERAL NOTES

Soaring geese at Tulelake, California.—At 1:10 P.M., February 27, 1944, while making observations on birds at the Tulelake National Wildlife Refuge, Tulelake, California, I heard the calling of a flock of Snow Geese (*Chen hyperborea*) as it passed rather high overhead. Noting that their flight was somewhat different from normal, I examined them through field glasses. The entire flock of 22 Snow Geese was clearly riding with outstretched set wings what was evidently a rising current of air. Their soaring was much like that of the Little Brown Crane (*Grus c. canadensis*) and Sandhill Crane (*G. c. tabida*) which I have watched in eastern New Mexico under similar weather conditions. I watched the flock of Snow Geese for more than 10 minutes as it drifted northward. During that time, I noted only an occasional wing beat. Shortly after the flock passed, a flock of 12 White-fronted Geese (*Anser albifrons*) passed, employing the same flight tactics. Their flight was also in a northerly direction. At the time of the observations the day was clear and warm, with only a slight breeze from the north. The soaring of these geese was evidently similar to that reported by Williams (*Condor*, 44, 1942:76) near Brigham City, Utah, in the fall of 1941.—CLARENCE A. SOOTER, *U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alice, Texas.*

Reaction of American Mergansers to Herring Gull depredations.—On February 16, 1943, Burt L. Monroe, Thomas Smith, and I observed the following episode, which illustrates some aspects of bird psychology. A flock of 12 to 15 Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) and 8 American Mergansers (*Mergus merganser americanus*) were fishing eight miles east of Louisville, Kentucky, at the mouth of Harrod's Creek. The small creek had frozen to within a hundred yards of its mouth, but the bay and river were open. We drove close to the shore and remained partially concealed in our automobile behind a large tree.

Soon a male merganser after a deep dive came up with a large fish in its bill. Instantly five or six of the gulls took wing and converged on the duck. The nearest gull easily snatched the fish, but being unable to swallow so large a mouthful soon lost it to another gull. The other gulls fought for possession until the fish was torn to bits. This happened several times, with the result that the mergansers were losing most of their catch. (With the broad expanse of the Ohio River, which was here more than 1,000 yards wide, to choose from, the mergansers remained to endure the persecution of the gulls probably because of the superior fishing at the mouth of the frozen creek.)

After a while, we noticed a gradual change in the fishing tactics of the mergansers. One came up with a fish. As usual, several gulls went for it, but before they could snatch it, the merganser dived with the fish still in its mouth. He came up 20 feet away in an open space and while swimming as rapidly as possible swallowed the food before the gulls could reach him. One gull, swooping too late for the fish, struck the merganser with all its weight, causing him to bob up and down, yet not frightening him enough to make him fly. Other mergansers also developed a watchfulness which enabled them to retain more and more of their fish. They seemed to pick spots in which to surface as remote as possible from the gulls, and they swallowed their catch quickly while avoiding the attacks of the gulls by swimming or diving.

After failing repeatedly to rob the mergansers of their fish, the gulls gradually lost interest and drifted farther out from shore, allowing the mergansers to fish unmolested. The ability of the American Mergansers to modify their behavior successfully in the face of the depredations of the gulls shows a surprising degree of adaptability.—HARVEY B. LOVELL, *Biology Department, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky.*

Migration records from Yucatan.—The following selected observations, recorded along the north coast of Yucatan chiefly during the spring months of 1936, may prove of value in connection with the recent discussions of trans-Gulf migration. In each instance reported, both the behavior of the birds and the attendant circumstances suggested that the birds were en route across the Gulf.

Turkey Vulture. Between February 2, and March 25, 1936, only one to six Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*) were recorded in the vicinity of Chichen Itza in the central part of the Yucatan Peninsula, some 50 miles inland from the north coast. On March 26, a flock of 13, and on March 27, individuals and small groups totaling 15, were moving northward over Chichen Itza. On March 31 and April 1, three to five separate individuals left the Yucatan shore between Progreso and Chicxulub (east of Progreso) and flew northward over the ocean until out of sight. About 8:00 A.M., April 2, a flock of seven came from the south and continued northward over the Gulf. In the clear atmosphere the large birds were visible for a great distance. On the same day, several individuals and small groups, totaling 18 birds, flew northward across the highway between Progreso and Chichen Itza.

Sparrow Hawk. On the morning of April 7, 1936, two Sparrow Hawks (*Falco sparverius*) were perched on the beach near Progreso within a few feet of the water. They repeatedly flew out over the Gulf but returned to the beach or to the vegetation immediately behind it. Finally, about 10:00 A.M., one of the hawks left the beach and flew northward over the ocean until lost from view.

Sandpipers. On March 31, 1936, many sandpipers were about the mud flats at Progreso. About 60 were identified as Least Sandpipers (*Erolia minutilla*), about 80 as Semi-palmated Sandpipers (*Ereuntes pusillus*). At dusk, several small compact flocks of "peeps" left the flats and flew northward over the water until out of sight.

Hummingbirds. On April 1, 1936, there were numerous hummingbirds on the beach between Progreso and Chicxulub. Some were perched among the sparse vegetation of the dunes, some on the beach itself—a number at the water's edge. About 60 were identified as Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (*Archilochus colubris*). At intervals throughout the day, individuals and small groups left the beach and flew northward over the ocean. Some returned after flying a little distance, but others continued northward until out of sight, and by evening few remained on the beach.

Barn Swallow. On April 7, 1936, a flock of some 40 Barn Swallows (*Hirundo erythrogaster*) was feeding and flying about the front beach and adjacent sand dunes between Progreso and Chicxulub. At intervals the birds flew out to sea until almost out of range of 8 x binoculars, then returned to resume feeding. Each time they flew outward, they stopped the customary revolving movements of feeding birds and assumed a disc-shaped formation. Finally, at about 10:30 A.M., they assumed this formation and flew northward over the ocean until out of sight. At 8:30 A.M. on August 11, 1937, two Barn Swallows, one adult and one immature, were perched on the stern of the ship *Munplacé*, which was then some 80 miles north of Progreso and moving northward. The two birds remained about the ship all morning, alternately perching on the rail and making excursions over the water. Although it has been supposed that swallows, in particular, migrate around the Gulf, these were apparently early fall migrants en route south across the Gulf. If this assumption is correct, the record has additional interest in relation to the well-known theory that swallows migrate only during daylight hours, since part of the migration of these swallows would necessarily have taken place during darkness. Worthington and Todd (*Wils. Bull.*, 38, 1926:220) also cite an instance of apparent night migration of the Barn Swallow.